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ABSTRACT

Gender differences in self-esteem across time were investigated by means of a comparison of the extent of congruence between an individual's self Q-sort and his or her Q-sort of the ideal self. Self Q-sorts were done when subjects were 11, 14, 18, and 23 years of age; they were done on separate occasions, at least a week apart. Ideal self Q-sorts were obtained when subjects were 14, 18, and 23. Subjects were 50 females and 45 males who had been studied from the age of 3 years. All analyses are for the sexes separately. Findings point out: (1) the shared and unshared self and observer attributions of those males and females with high self-esteem; (2) the consistency and reliability of self-esteem Q-based congruence scores; (3) sex differences in level of self-esteem over time; (4) the nonsignificance of social class for ideal self-attributions at any age for either sex; (5) the relation of ego-control to self-esteem; (6) the similarity of individuals' self-descriptions over time; and (7) problems associated with use of the Rosenberg index of self-esteem. (RH)

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SELF-ESTEEM THROUGH TIME: GENDER SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

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Method of measuring Self-Esteem: degree of congruence between an individual's self Q-sort and the individual's Q-sort of the ideal self (the SEQ score). The Q-sorts were done on separate occasions, at least a week apart. The Q-set contained 43 widely-ranging personality-relevant adjectives.

Times of measurement: Self Q-sorts at ages 11, 14, 18, and 23. Ideal self Q-sorts at ages 14, 18, and 23.

Sample: 50 girls and 45 boys, followed from the age of 3 years. All analyses are for the sexes separately.

Other data available: observer-based personality evaluations using the California Q-set at these ages, Wechsler IQ and SES, indices of ego-resiliency and ego-control, *inter alia*.

Some Findings:

Focusing on the age 23 data, what personality characteristics do young women and young men manifesting high self esteem via the SEQ congruence approach attribute to themselves? Looking at the differentiating adjectives (an analysis logically independent of establishing the SEQ congruence score), both sexes are self-described as calm, relaxed, cheerful, independent, logical, responsible, and self confident. They do not view themselves as self-centered, restless, hypercritical, fearful, distractible, impulsive, dependent, or readily upset. But, in their self descriptions, there are significant differences as well between young women of high self esteem and young men of high self esteem. Whereas these young women view themselves as relatively trusting, the young men do not. Whereas these young women of high self esteem see themselves as sociable, talkative, oriented toward others, and flexible, the young men with high self esteem do not have these self views. On the other hand, these young men attribute competitiveness to themselves, a quality irrelevant to these young women. These gender-differentiating qualities with respect to self-esteem seem to be largely a further expression of gender differences in self-evaluations without regard specifically to self-esteem.

Another source of information regarding the characteristics of these young women and young men comes from the evaluations of these young people by independent observers who have interviewed them or interacted with them in diverse situations. These observer-based observations, expressed via formulations encoded by the California Q-set and composited over four to six observers, indicate young women and young men with high self-esteem both are observed to be relatively cheerful, poised, productive, without concern for their personal adequacy, have a sense of meaning in life, and favoring of conservative values. They tend not to delay or avoid action, give up when frustrated, ruminate, become maladaptive when under stress, have fluctuating moods, or feel cheated

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and victimized by life. However, as viewed by observers, there are differences as well between young women with high self esteem and young men with high self esteem. Thus, the young women judged to be relatively more gregarious and talkative, and not avoidant of interpersonal relationships, to be quite assertive and even somewhat flamboyant, to offer advice and to create dependency in others whereas the young men with high self-esteem are judged to be less assertive (but by no means unassertive), less sensuous, and to be emotionally bland. So, both self attributions and judgments of independent observers agree in essential respects in the psychological characterization of what it means to have self esteem, a convergence nice to have.

For the sample of girls, the self-esteem Q-based congruence scores (SEQ) display reasonably good across time consistency, correlating .48 from age 14 to 18, and .55 from age 18 to 23. For the sample of boys, the comparable correlations are somewhat lower, .37, and .32.

The reliabilities of the self-esteem Q-based congruence scores (SEQ) are adequate, averaging in the low 70's for adolescent boys and averaging in the low 80's for adolescent girls. These differences in reliabilities are quite consistent and somewhat but by no means sufficiently account for the differences in SEQ consistency observed in the two sexes. Related to these reliabilities differences is the finding that the sample of girls consistently displays an appreciably greater dispersion and a more negatively skewed distribution of self-esteem scores than the sample of boys.

The sexes diverge in level of self-esteem over time, primarily in the period from age 14 to age 18, being just about equal in SEQ at age 14, differing significantly at age 18 ($p < .03$), and differing even more significantly at age 23 ($p < .006$). The mean SEQs of the boys for ages 14, 18, and 23 are .53, .62, and .61, respectively, rising during the course of adolescence; the mean SEQs of the girls for the three ages are .53, .53, and .48, decreasing somewhat during the course of adolescence. This is an implicative finding, interpretable in a number of ways, all of which suggest the problems of self-definition in this society are more difficult for girls than for boys.

SEQ does not correlate with social class at any age for either sex. At age 14, SEQ correlates .38 with IQ in boys and -.01 in girls, a highly significant correlational difference which I choose to interpret. Raw IQ *per se* should bolster one's self-esteem at least partially as the experiences of life cumulatively testify that one is smarter than most. For adolescent boys, this seems to be so but for adolescent girls, intelligence does not seem to provide a foundation for self-esteem. Indeed, some analyses within our study indicate that IQ, measured from an early age and thereafter, significantly foretells later depression in young women perhaps because the intelligent girl recognizes complexities and conflicts in her life situation that are undiscerned or untroubling to the less intelligent girl.

Ego-control does not correlate significantly with self-esteem but there are suggestions that moving away from over-control is helpful to girls while moving away from under-control is helpful to boys. Ego-resiliency does relate significantly to self-esteem in girls. Interestingly, so far in our analysis, for girls ego resiliency at one age correlates more strongly with self-esteem at a later age than it does with self-esteem at the same age perhaps suggesting that as a resourceful competence is developed, a sense of self-esteem follows. For boys, the relations

between resiliency and self-esteem are consistent but low, perhaps reflecting the greater homogeneity of the boys with respect to self-esteem.

Of related interest is the correlation between self-descriptions over time: how similar are the self descriptions of individuals from age 11 to age 14, from age 14 to age 18, and from age 18 to age 23? For the girls, the average cross time correlation between 11 and 14 was .47; between 14 and 18, .59; and between 18 and 23, .61. For boys, the corresponding average correlations were .50, .53, and .59. All of these averages are substantial and suggest that, in fundamental ways, by adolescence very many individuals have achieved a self-view of considerable stability which continues to solidify.

Finally, because of the widespread usage of the Rosenberg index of self-esteem, I mention some of our findings using this measure at age 23. The Rosenberg questionnaire consists of 10 items such as: "At times I think I am no good at all," "I certainly feel useless at times," "I wish I could have more respect for myself; "All in all, I am inclined to feel I am a failure." It is very quick to administer and has a very high internal consistency reliability, in the .90s (but only because its items are narrowly redundant, an unfair way to achieve a high coefficient alpha). In our study, it correlates .08 with SEQ at age 23 for young women and .27 for young males, correspondences that are not exciting. When correlated with the independent, observer-based personality evaluations of the subjects, only 5 of the 100 CAQ-items were significant at the .05 level for the young women and only 5 for the young men. By way of contrast, when the SEQ index was correlated with the same observer-based personality evaluations, 38 of the CAQ-items were significant at the .05 level for the young women and 26 were significant for the young men. In this sample, then, (and I would suggest more generally), the Rosenberg measure is not as incisive and generative of relations as is the SEQ approach to indexing self-esteem. Its convenience and widespread usage may not be sufficiently justifying.